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The Afghan Insurgents and Pakistan: Problems for Islamabad and Moscow

An Intelligence Memorandum

**The Afghan Insurgents and
Pakistan: Problems for
Islamabad and Moscow** [REDACTED]

Summary

One of Pakistan's immediate worries in the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan is that Soviet operations against rebellious tribesmen there will lead to Soviet incursions into Pakistan.

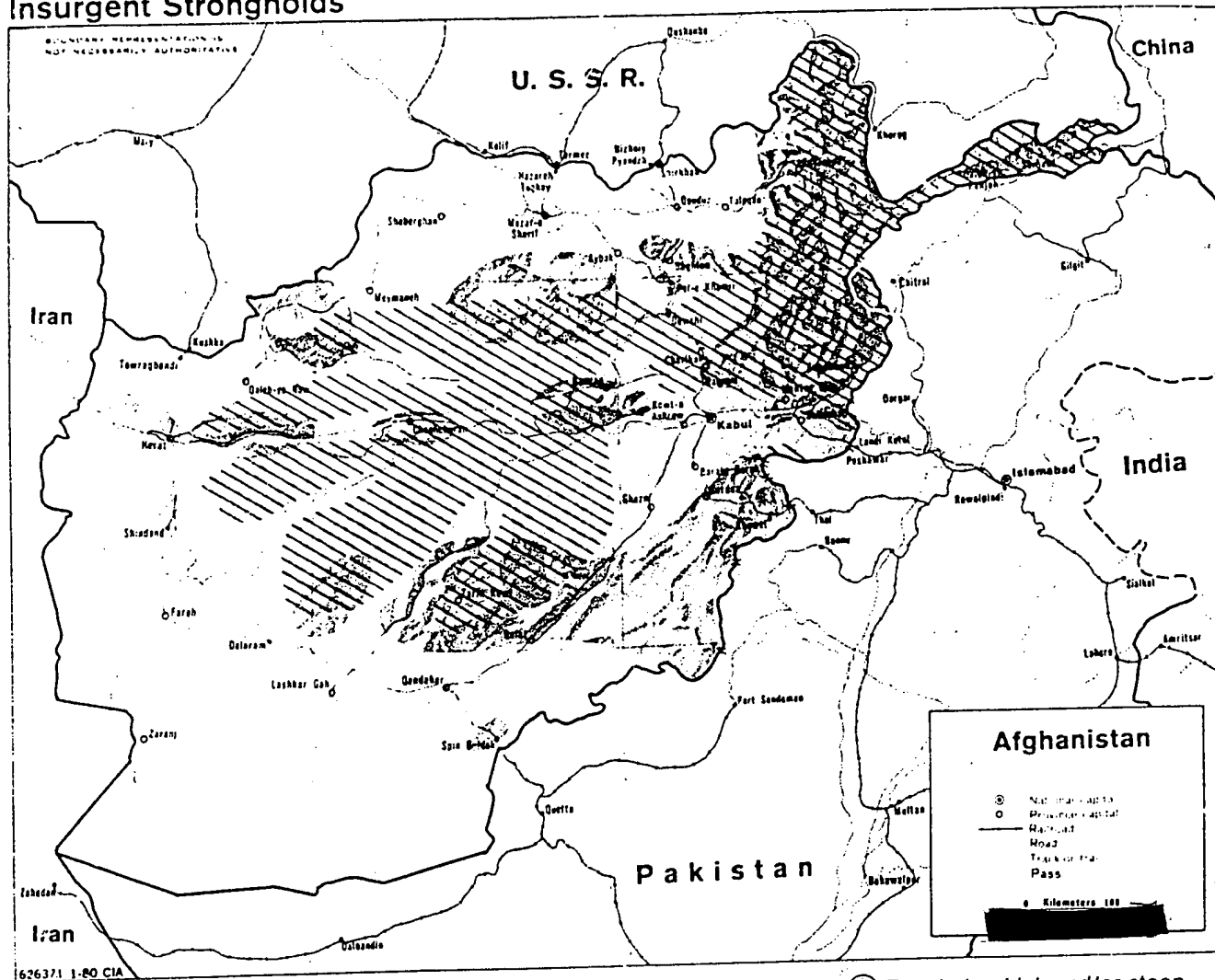
So far, the Afghan insurgents have not depended heavily on Pakistan for help or the use of territory. If the Soviets push the insurgents back toward the border areas, however, Pakistani support could become crucial. Pakistan might be unable, even if it were willing, to comply with Soviet demands to curtail insurgent activity. The Soviets would attempt to deny the use of Pakistan to the insurgents, and Moscow could decide to take military action on Pakistan's side of the border against the insurgents, or even against the Pakistanis.

[REDACTED]

This memorandum was prepared by [REDACTED] Office of Political Analysis, and [REDACTED] Office of Political Analysis. It was coordinated with the Office of Strategic Research and the National Intelligence Officers for Near East and South Asia and for USSR-Eastern Europe. Research was completed on 21 January 1980. Questions and comments are welcome and should be addressed to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Insurgent Strongholds



○ Area of insurgent activity

○ Terrain too high and/or steep for airmobile operations

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Insurgent Use of Pakistan

Facilities in Pakistan have been useful to the Afghan insurgents but not essential to the survival of the rebellion. Almost all insurgent operations have been launched from within Afghanistan, and much rebel action has taken place in areas that are not contiguous to Pakistan.

Although the Afghan tribesmen are able to purchase weapons and ammunition in Pakistan, most of their military supplies were either in their hands before the insurgency began or have been obtained—through desertions and capture—from the Afghan military. Some insurgents probably have been trained in tribal areas in Pakistan and have stockpiled military supplies and even taken prisoners to Pakistan. The rebels, however, control enough territory in Afghanistan to obviate the need for bases in Pakistan.

Some exile groups maintain headquarters in Pakistan and use it as a base for directing propaganda at both the Afghan people and the foreign press. The contribution of these groups to the amorphous, tribal-based insurgency in Afghanistan, however, has been minimal.

Despite repeated public denunciations by Kabul and Moscow of Pakistani aid to the insurgents, there have been no serious border incidents. Cross-border shellings have been brief and ineffective. Occasional air raids have been made by single planes, and their penetration has usually been too shallow to give the Pakistanis time to intercept them.

Moscow and Kabul are aware of the risk of pushing Pakistan into retaliatory action or greatly stepped-up aid to the rebels. Although Pakistani leaders have contemplated a military response, so far they have limited themselves to diplomatic protests to avoid increasing tensions with Afghanistan and the USSR.

The Refugees

The Afghan refugees—who Pakistani officials predict will soon number half a million—could become a major point of contention. Despite Soviet and Afghan charges, there is no solid evidence that the refugees have played more than a marginal role in the insurgency. Most are the very young or are women and elderly men who are unfit for military action. Although some undoubtedly have joined the insurgents, and insurgent groups have

occasionally entered Pakistan under the guise of refugees, most refugees have fled Afghanistan simply because it became too dangerous. But Pakistani territory makes an important contribution to the insurgency by providing a safe haven for the families of rebels. [REDACTED]

The Pakistanis do not have much control over the refugees. Only a small percentage—less than 2 percent by one estimate—live in government camps. Most have either been living with related Pakistani tribes (many tribes live on both sides of the border) or have built numerous encampments without government permission or assistance. [REDACTED]

The refugees are less of a domestic political problem for Islamabad in the border areas than they would be in heavily settled areas away from the border. Furthermore, forcible return of the refugees to Afghanistan would be unpopular with fellow Pathans in Pakistan, would probably be resisted by the refugees, and might reduce their number only temporarily. [REDACTED]

In the past, despite the formation of several short-lived fronts, rivalries among the various exile groups have limited their effectiveness. Now under pressure from both the Pakistani Government and events in Afghanistan, the groups appear to be moving toward a more lasting coalition that could lead to the formation of an Afghan government-in-exile. Although such a coalition would have major difficulties in directing insurgent activities in Afghanistan, it could serve as a more effective channel for foreign assistance to the insurgents. The establishment of a government-in-exile, moreover, would inevitably undercut the legitimacy of the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul. [REDACTED]

Establishment of a government-in-exile in Pakistan would annoy the Soviets. Pakistan is clearly able to prevent the exiles from operating openly in Peshawar, the major city near the Afghan border. Moscow and Kabul could hardly view the establishment of a government-in-exile on Pakistani soil as anything but an indication of increased Pakistani support for the insurgency. [REDACTED]

**Problems for
Islamabad . . .**

Even if it wanted to, Islamabad would have difficulty controlling the supply of arms to the insurgents from Pakistan. Although the Pakistani Government may have indirectly supplied some weapons to the insurgents through related Pakistani tribes, most of the military supplies obtained in Pakistan by the insurgents have been purchased from private dealers. [REDACTED]

Both the manufacture and sale of Pakistani copies of foreign arms take place in areas where many Pakistani laws do not apply and where enforcement has always been difficult. Although the Pakistani Government could clamp down on the arms trade—which operates openly—it would risk a backlash in tribal areas, and Islamabad could not eliminate manufacturing and smuggling completely. [REDACTED]

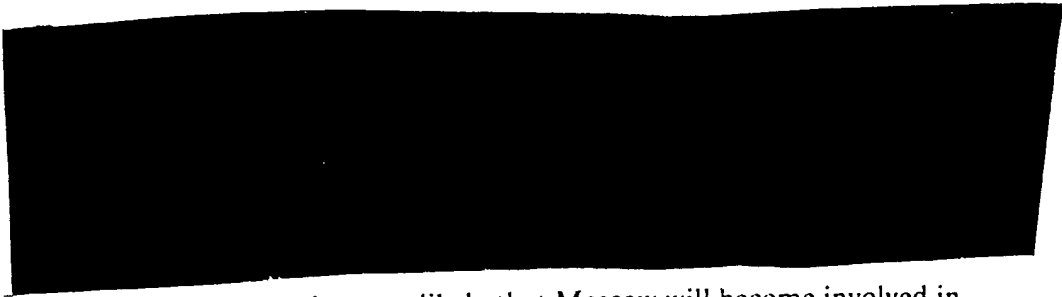
Pakistan would also have difficulty restricting the use of Pakistani territory by insurgent groups. Most of the border is uncontrolled and unmarked. It is ignored by the tribesmen who seasonally migrate across it. Pakistan could make cross-border movements more difficult, but only with considerable effort and by moving more military units to the Afghan border. This could lead to clashes with the insurgents and with Pakistani Pathans, who are always sensitive to government control in the North-West Frontier Province. The government might be criticized more widely in Pakistan for appearing to knuckle under to the Soviets. [REDACTED]


Any Pakistani effort to crack down on insurgent activity could also bring foreign criticism. In Islamic countries—including those important to Pakistan, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran—this action would be seen as aiding the Communist effort to suppress Islam. [REDACTED]


... and for Moscow

The question of how to deal with insurgent use of Pakistan already seems to be preoccupying Moscow. The Soviets have publicly charged that the insurgents are making extensive use of Pakistan and receive substantial foreign support there. Moscow may have an exaggerated notion of the support the insurgents are receiving. In any event, Moscow is undoubtedly concerned that the United States and China will use Pakistan to funnel supplies to the rebels. [REDACTED]


At least in the short term, while Soviet forces are involved in consolidating their hold in Afghanistan, border raids by the Soviets are unlikely. At an official level, Moscow—anxious to avoid pushing Islamabad further toward the United States—is now seeking cooperation from Pakistan on the insurgent issue and saying that the Soviet presence in Afghanistan poses no threat to Pakistan. The Soviets, however, have coupled this approach with pressure to close the border and move Afghan refugee camps away from the frontier. Soviet officials also are spreading the word that Moscow reserves the right to take military action against the rebels in Pakistan. It is possible, that if Moscow thought President Zia was about to decide to increase support for the rebels, the Soviets might undertake a military action against Afghan targets in Pakistan to indicate the danger of such a course. [REDACTED]



Over the longer term, it seems likely that Moscow will become involved in protracted efforts to quell the insurgency in Afghanistan. In such circumstances, the Soviet interest in curtailing insurgent use of Pakistan is likely to mount. If Soviet counterinsurgency efforts are fairly successful, they probably will force many rebels along Afghanistan's eastern frontier to flee and make them more dependent on facilities in Pakistan. On the other hand, the more difficult and costly the anti-insurgent campaign becomes for the Soviets, the more pressure there will be on Soviet political leaders to authorize military action into Pakistan. In either case, the Soviets may conclude that an effective end to the rebellion would depend on the elimination of a safe haven in Pakistan for the insurgents. 

Initially, Moscow would intensify pressure on Pakistan to deny its territory to the insurgents. If Pakistan were to defy Soviet demands or become more extensively involved in supporting the insurgents, the Soviets might take more aggressive action. Given the damage to the Soviets' international position that has resulted from the Afghan invasion, Moscow is unlikely to be significantly constrained from such action by anything short of the threat of military counteraction. Comments by Soviet officials already have suggested the justification the Soviets might make. They have said that Pakistan is unable to control the Afghan refugees and that Moscow, therefore, would have to do the job for Islamabad. 

Soviet Military Options

Moscow's first military response might be to try to seal the Pakistani-Afghan border. This would be a very difficult task since the long border is crossed by trails at thousands of points. The high altitude and difficult terrain—particularly north of the Khyber Pass—and the prospect of nighttime movement by the rebels limits the effectiveness of Soviet airpower and mobility. The Soviets, however, could control movement through the main passes. The Soviets probably would also be able to disrupt the movement of large groups and substantial amounts of supplies, but so far the insurgents have not had to depend on an extensive logistics system. 

If the Soviets moved against the insurgents in Pakistan, they would have several options:

- Moscow could use Afghan forces against Pakistan in the hope of forestalling sharp international reaction. In view of the growing ineffectiveness of the Afghan military, such a course would seem to offer little hope of disrupting the insurgents.
- The Soviets could relax restrictions on their forces aimed at preventing violations of the border. Under such a policy some border violations would be inevitable but probably not serious enough to lead to a confrontation with Pakistan. This most likely would do no more than make it marginally easier for the Soviets to deal with insurgents on the Afghan side of the border.
- The USSR could allow hot pursuit of rebel bands. More serious border violations would result, and the chances of clashes with Pakistani troops would increase. Nevertheless, depending on the size and depth of Soviet penetrations, Islamabad might try to avoid a response as long as possible, perhaps until it was clear that the penetrations were deliberate policy and became widely known in Pakistan.
- Moscow could raid rebel camps in Pakistan, either on the ground or by air. Because the camps are small and dispersed, such raids would have little effect on rebel capabilities, but they would increase the risk of a response from Pakistan. Pakistan would almost certainly appeal to the United States and China for assistance.
- Soviet forces could attack Pakistani facilities—for example, tribal gun factories or even Pakistani military installations. Islamabad would have difficulty regarding raids of this type as anything but an act of war. Any government that failed to react strongly would face severe domestic criticism and might fall. Moscow would be unlikely to risk such action unless it was confident Pakistan could not count on outside help. In such circumstances, Pakistan might have no choice but to give in to Soviet pressure. [REDACTED]